



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

119 ILLEGAL ALIENS IN ARKADELPHIA ARRESTED BY ICE AGENTS

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents yesterday arrested 119 illegal aliens here at Petit Jean Poultry Inc. following an audit of the company's employee records, and in response to a February identity theft conviction.

Those arrested were employed at the facility using actual identities of United States citizens. Special agents from the local ICE Texarkana Office were joined by 30 agents from other ICE regional offices. The ICE New Orleans Office of Investigations conducted the employee audit pursuant to an administrative search warrant obtained from the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas. Special agents from the Little Rock Office of the Social Security Administration's Inspector General office assisted in the operation.

Many aliens apprehended at Petit Jean were determined to have illegally purchased U.S. citizen birth certificates and Social Security Cards, and then used those documents to obtain identification cards bearing their photos from the State of Arkansas. The Arkansas identification cards were then used to obtain employment under the stolen identity.

Yesterday's operation stemmed from an ICE investigation into the sale of U.S. citizen birth certificates and social security cards that culminated in the December 2004 arrest of a former Petit Jean employee. The employee, Maria Moreno of Arkadelphia, Ark., pleaded guilty Feb. 14 to multiple counts of a federal indictment charging that she unlawfully sold identity documents and social security cards. Approximately \$60,000 in cash was seized from Moreno as suspected proceeds of her unlawful activities.

The arrested aliens were turned over to ICE Detention and Removal Operations. Information regarding fraudulently used Social Security numbers will be provided to the Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service to unscramble the earning records of the affected U.S. citizen victims.

Of those arrested, two were from Honduras, one from El Salvador, one from Guatemala, and the remaining 115 aliens were from Mexico. There were a total of 50 males, 69 females, one of which was a 14-year-old juvenile. Wages paid to the illegal aliens ranged from \$6 to \$6.80 per hour.

"ICE is committed to enforcing laws relating to identity theft, false claims to U.S. citizenship, and fraud," said Craig Griffin, resident agent-in-charge for the ICE Texarkana office. "We will arrest those who violate immigration employment laws and continue to restore integrity to the U.S. immigration system."

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is continuing to investigate this case.

ICE

ICE, the primary investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, was established to bring a unified focus to the enforcement of U.S. immigration and customs laws, with the principal goal of preventing violations by terrorists and other criminals who threaten the nation's security.